

AURORA

Brexit or Remain Workers Pay Either Way

For the "remain" section of the capitalist class the unexpected result of the 2016 referendum meant they had lost control of the political process. Now the December general election has confirmed the "leavers" will be in control for the next 5 years. It is slowly becoming clear that the leavers want to turn the UK into a low wage, low regulation economy undercutting EU competitors and also make it a haven for speculation and hedge funds. The referendum and the election were both won by posing the issues in terms of nationalism rather than class. The decade of austerity and hardship workers have suffered since the 2008 crisis was blamed on EU regulations and EU immigrant workers. The cry of the leavers was simply:

"The barbarians are at the gate, pull up the drawbridge! The good years can return only if British capitalists take control."

However, the real force driving this pantomime is the economic crisis. 10 years of low interest rates, quantitative easing, and cuts in wages and welfare have not brought a recovery in either the UK, where the economy contracted in November, or in the global economy, where growth rates are in continual decline. The reason none of this medicine has worked is that the true cause of the crisis is the general decline in profit rates which is the result of the way

capitalism itself works. The capitalist class will never admit this. It's easier to blame foreigners, while telling the working class to rally round the flag, tighten their belts and accept austerity – austerity always, supposedly, temporary. For the ruling class the easiest way to restore profits is to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class. That is the thread which links all the scenes of the Brexit drama. That is also why, for the working class, the next 5 years will bring more low-wage, temporary, precarious jobs, more cuts to welfare, services, pensions and more debt. All this will now be presented as the will of the British people - as what the people voted for.

The Election

The CWO has consistently argued for workers not to vote in capitalist elections because elections only camouflage the real dictatorship of the capitalist class. They enable our rulers to claim they govern by the will of the majority, to present parliament as the forum where workers' grievances and problems can be addressed and solved and to claim all independent class struggle is unnecessary. The December election was a confirmation of all this. Faced with the choice of Brexit or a

more interventionist state capitalism under Corbyn, the capitalist class preferred Brexit and its control of the dominant ideas in society, particularly via the media, ensured they got the election result they wanted. But what about the Labour Party, wasn't it proposing an alternative to capitalism?

Labour Party

What Labour was offering was a return to a type of mixed economy of the post-war years, where the state holds important sections of capital directly. This has nothing to do with socialism since the relation of social domination of capital over labour remains. It is simply a deception to call it socialism. But in doing this the real role of the Labour Party is exposed – the role of reconciling the working class to capitalism. Two variations of capitalism were being offered in the election. Both Tories and Labour are capitalist parties to the core. But couldn't the Labour Party be converted into a workers' party if enough socialists enter it? This has been the strategy of Stalinists and Trotskyists from the post-World War 1 period to the present and has been a spectacular failure for the best part of a century. The December election once again confirmed this. Those who enter the party to

transform it into a workers' party are either transformed themselves into the party's pro-capitalist bureaucracy, or get demoralised and leave politics, or like the Militant tendency in the 80s, get kicked out. The party's role in containing or sabotaging class resistance to capitalism continues unchecked. In general what all this shows is that there is no parliamentary road to socialism and those who pretend there is are just peddling lies. So what is the way forward?

Class Struggle/Political Struggle

In the future the attacks on wages and conditions will not only carry on but will increase in ferocity. As the problems of the system increase, we are seeing mass struggles in many parts of the world which are a symptom of capitalism's crisis and decay. These struggles are today cross-class struggles and so are unable to lead to a solution. The truth is the capitalist system itself needs to be overthrown and only the world's workers can do this. The global working class needs to re-enter the political arena as a force to lead the future struggles and turn them against the whole capitalist system. This means a revival of class struggle for class interests such as wages, conditions and social benefits, a struggle which ignores the interests of capitalism and orients itself towards the creation of a socialist world.

Can Capitalist Reform Save The Environment?

The Stockholm Resilience Centre has recently identified a number of key issues which are becoming catastrophic for life on Earth. Climate change is only one of them but it's top of the list.

Capitalism is only concerned with short term profits; and the costs to the environment like pollution and the extinction of plant, insect, animal life and pollution are simply "externalities". Pollution from agricultural fertilisers, mining, and destruction of rain-forests are "externalities" to profits derived directly from these activities. In cities all around the world, pollution from the factories and vehicles of the profit machine cause lung disease and damages children's brain development – further "externalities". For capitalism it's more important to make profits than for children to grow up healthy.

At some point in the near future, climate change will become irreversible. Burning fossil fuels is releasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere trapping heat

from the sun. The slow warming of the planet causes secondary effects such as melting polar ice, release of methane previously trapped in permafrost regions, turning forests from carbon sinks to CO₂ emitters etc. all making global heating worse. Over the coming decades hundreds of millions of people will be subject to "water stress." Water rationing in cities such as Cape Town and Mumbai are already harbingers of what is to come. Weather patterns such as extreme droughts, floods, wild fires such as in Australia at the end of 2019 are direct consequences of increased temperatures. A quarter of all CO₂ discharged ends up in the oceans making them more acidic. The result is coral reefs are dying, marine life is unable to build shells and fish stocks are collapsing. So what can be done about it?

A Green Solution?

Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion and the Green lobby call for governments to commit to targets to reduce the production of greenhouse emissions and invest in

green energy. In the US and elsewhere there are campaigns for a "Green New Deal." The "Sunrise Movement" activists in the US, backed by Democratic congress woman, Ocasio-Cortez, call for a deal to create a "100% renewable energy system and a fully modernised electrical grid by 2035." They hope that shifting production to greener alternatives can kick-start a moribund capitalism and save the planet at the same time. In the UK the "Common Wealth" think tank also calls for a new deal similar to that proposed for the US.

Many of the solutions favoured by the Green lobby involve environmental destruction and pollution themselves. Mining large quantities of rare earth metals, cobalt and lithium, required for green energy, cause appalling pollution. China, where 70% of rare earths are mined, has poisoned vast areas of land. Mining lithium, for car batteries, in the Atacama desert in Chile has already destroyed salt water lakes and robbed the freshwater aquifer. The fact that capitalism requires continual growth and each nation state is in competition to gain a competitive advantage over its rivals means the environment must always remain an "externality." What capitalists can never admit is that the cause of the entire suite of environmental problems is global capitalism itself. Hence all solutions which leave capitalism in place are futile.

The Only Realistic Solution

Capitalism's production for profit has from the start involved exploiting nature's "free" natural resources. Humanity lives through a relationship with nature and

capitalism's strangling of nature, threatens the existence of not only plants, insects and animals but the existence of mankind itself. The environmental catastrophe is a product of the capitalist system of production. While the environmental movements of today are a response to real contradictions of the system, they pretend there is a solution within the system. However, the truth is that these problems cannot be solved while we continue producing for profit. Attempting to reform elements of capitalism while production for profit remains can only lead to failure. We need to start producing for human needs in a globally planned way. This means the overthrow of this insane system, which in turn means revolution. Revolution can only be carried out by the exploited class, the working class, which itself suffers the worst effects of the environmental crisis. The problem is a political one of creating the consciousness of the need for revolution and building a political organisation to help achieve this.

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Strikes in France: Workers against the State and the Unions

Globally the capitalist class is trying to squeeze more profit out of the working class. Agreements made with the working class following the Second World War are being ripped up and workers are being divided, national against foreign, old against young, public sector against private. In France, the state is trying to reduce pensions and increase retirement age. Pensions are deferred wages – payments workers have made over years of work which the state now intends to steal. Dividing the workers is the strategy of capitalists to prevent a real fightback. However, French workers in transport and civil service have been fighting back with strikes and demonstrations. The rail strike, the longest since the War, is part of a much wider movement. But the struggle is being controlled by the unions, doing capitalism's dirty work.

The strikes have been denounced by President Macron as "a mobilisation against the end of special regimes", against "equality and social justice". Macron's lie that rail-workers and others have a "special regime" are being selfish and irresponsible for trying to maintain their so-called "privileges" is part of the strategy to divide workers so the pensions theft can be implemented. But French workers have ignored this and become an inspiration to workers everywhere, even though the capitalist press has tried to ignore them.

Dividing Workers

Another key element in the strategy of division is by "Grandfather clause", which makes the new pension measures hit

especially the new generation of workers and so enforce a division between different generations.

The unions have played their part in this. In September last year, they undermined the struggle by splitting it up into multiple days of sector by sector actions (RATP Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens, public finances, National Education, Justice Ministry, EDF, fire-fighters, etc.). In early October, they finally promised a great day of mobilisation uniting all sectors but only for the month of December! Workers who are all fighting over the same issue are finding themselves isolated, with their own specific slogans, whereas all workers are suffering from the same degradation of living and working conditions. These familiar union tactics are preparation for accepting the bulk of the cuts after a few minor concessions from the government.

Thus, the offer to withdraw the plan to raise the official retirement age from 62 to 64, which was immediately welcomed by the largest trade union, the "moderate"

Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), despite its inclusion of the condition of working extra years to get the full pension. However, the health minister Agnes Buzyn has since refused to withdraw the policy of raising the pension age but instead postponing it. Meanwhile, the more "radical" trade unions, such as the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), say they will continue their "actions" rejecting the entire "reform". In reality the unions are waiting for workers to run out of money. Thus, on 27th of January the Unsa-RATP union suspended the strike after 45 days saying "their members needed to recharge their batteries." When the unions' "actions" have finally exhausted the workforce, the government will be able to put its 'reform' safely in place.

Effective Struggle

As it is, all union-led "actions" are based on divisions and negotiated defeats dressed up as 'the best that could be done'. Today, workers, the unemployed, the retired and students are not yet aware



of the possibility of their collective strength. A first step in any struggle is self-organised mass meetings or general assemblies, where we can decide how to conduct the movement and forge the weapons needed to resist the never-ending attacks and sacrifices demanded by the bosses. French workers are no strangers to General Assemblies (the rail workers meet every day) but most are under union control.

Even so, it's not just a question of this or that form but more important, it's real content. Assemblies confined to different categories sound good, but as long as the unions are in control they will remain simply a place where leftists sound off to each other. Genuine expressions of class unity, for example, will allow nurses, emergency workers, the unemployed, and all those who can't go on strike, to participate in the movement. They will put forward demands which concern everyone, and would give a lead to the kind of general discontent that is currently raging in France over a whole range of issues. As it is, the strikes in France are showing signs of exhaustion, but there is no letup in the attacks on wage workers everywhere from a bankrupt global capitalism. It is only a matter of time before somewhere workers' pent-up rage and trade union loyalty will turn into an independent movement that challenges capitalism itself. At that point we will be in a new ball game where the political message of the Internationalists will need to be heard: above all in the mass meetings of the working class.

US/Iran Rivalry: What No War But the Class War Really Means

Since the First World War the Middle East has been a key theatre of imperialist rivalry because of its oil. Globally US domination is being challenged, not only by Russia but also by China. They want to undermine US power by reducing the role of the dollar in both the oil trade and international trade generally. In the region itself Iran has gained most from the US blunders. Bush's destruction of Iraq removed the most effective counterweight to Iranian influence and allowed Iran's influence to extend to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. So Iran is a more serious threat to both Israel and Saudi Arabia: America's stalwart allies since British imperialism lost out after the Second World War. So now the US is trying to isolate Iran and weaken its influence in the region, either via regime change or economic strangulation. These are the forces behind the drama being played out between the US and Iran.

The Troubles of Iranian Imperialism

The US has struck at the Achilles' heel of Iranian imperialism: its economy. Trump's tearing up the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement, which was supposed to see sanctions lifted in return for Iran scaling back its nuclear programme, was the first move. Now the screws are being tightened. The key role of the dollar in international trade means that European firms are forced to comply with US sanctions even while condemning them.

But the whole world is being ravaged by the capitalist economic crisis and Iranian imperialism faces its own problems. At the end of 2019, a wave of demonstrations broke out in Lebanon, Iraq and in Iran itself. All these countries are seething with discontent. Lebanon faces the worst economic crisis in its history. Iraq suffers long term unemployment, many shortages and a lack of basic services, while in Iran

inflation is 40% and 16 million now live below the official poverty line. Despite a death toll way up in the hundreds, daily demonstrations continue against the Iranian-backed government and militia using live bullets.

Within Iran itself, the regime has removed fuel subsidies in response to US sanctions. This sparked the biggest protests against the regime in a decade. Demonstrators from all social classes protested over the ruling clergy's rampant corruption and exemption from taxation.

Peaceful demonstrations turned violent when the Revolutionary Guard fired on them. Unemployed youths attacked police cars, banks (owned by the Revolutionary Guards), religious and government buildings. In the carnage which followed 1,500 are estimated to have died despite the Revolutionary Guards trying to hide the bodies. The desperate situation of the Iranian working class is shown by their preparedness to rebel against a vicious regime with a murderous secret police force, which killed at least 7,000 in 1988 alone.

The killings restored order but then the US assassinated the Iranian General Suleimani, and some Iraqi militia leaders. This was a gift for the Iranian regime, which immediately orchestrated days of mourning and nationalist rallies as the body of this so-called martyr toured the country. The incompetence of the regime was demonstrated almost immediately by the death of 50 people in the funeral crush followed by the shooting down of the Ukrainian International Airlines Flight 752.

Quiet vigils for the dead, who were largely Iranians, soon turned into open defiance of the regime which lasted nearly a week. The slogans appearing in all the movements since last November called for Khomeini and the mullahs to pack up and go.

Politically and economically the regime

totters on the edge of bankruptcy. Only physical force is now holding the regime together in the face of a worsening economic situation.

The best hope, despite all the repression, remains the working class. They have shown they reject any idea that the system can be changed from within. The strikes of Haft Tapeh workers in 2018, with their call for a revival of the shuras or workers' councils which appeared in 1979, struck a chord with other workers ranging from bus drivers to teachers. Significantly, they also stood for a movement independent of all capitalist factions.

What does anti-imperialism mean?

Though China continues to buy Iranian oil in defiance of the US, neither China nor Russia is offering free gifts to bail out the regime. The scene is thus set for yet more

suffering and bloodletting.

Both the US and Iran are imperialist powers, even if one is global and the other regional. Workers and revolutionaries can't identify with either of them. What sense does it make to call for "Hands off Iran" when the biggest exploiter and oppressor of the Iranian working class is their "own" government? Our solidarity is not with regimes but with the international working class. Our task is to build up the resistance to our own rulers wherever we are. We must aim to create an international political movement (a party) which supports and gives a compass to the independent struggle of the working class. Our solidarity is thus with the Iranian workers' call for councils. The only war we support is the class war against a rotting world capitalism.

What We Stand For

Aurora is published by the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO).

The CWO stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organisation – a 'party' for want of a better word – not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

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